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Near East/North Africa Report

(FOUO 45/81)



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AFGHANISTAN

FOREIGN REPORTER SAYS 'PEACE IS NOT IN SIGHT' IN NEAR FUTURE

London THE MIDDLE EAST in English Nov 81 No.81 pp 27-28

[Article by Anthony Hyman]

[Text] **W**ith the approach of the third winter of Soviet-imposed rule in Kabul, there seems no real prospect of a settlement which could bring peace to Afghanistan. If anything, there is less chance than before of the Afghan opposition coming to terms with the Babrak Karmal government.

Lightly-armed guerrilla forces have proved their increasing effectiveness in the field against Soviet troops - to the surprise of many observers who expected Soviet airpower and discipline to deal a swift blow to the resistance. Yet while firm control of towns and highways has eluded Soviet grasp, the Afghan guerrillas have also been unable to establish their control in the countryside, where they still resort to ambushes and hit-and-run raids. It is a stalemate which is developing, in which tenacity will count for as much as courage and firepower in the long term.

The efforts of the Karmal government to attract support by a shrewd mixture of concessions and threats has largely failed because the Afghan public still see President Karmal as "a Soviet puppet". The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), small as it is, is split by fierce hatreds into two factions: Khalqis, who followed President Hafizullah Amin (killed when the Russians intervened in the last week of 1979), and the smaller faction of Parchamis, following Karmal. The present administration is riddled with sympathisers (active or passive) with the opposition.

Many Afghans in responsible posts in the civil administration both in the capital and in the provincial towns co-operate with the very *mojahedin* (Muslim guerrillas) whom they are supposed to oppose. Likewise,

in the police and army there are many officers who manage to send information, arms and ammunition to the "enemy", even aiding in night-attacks by the guerrillas. Whether such help comes from Afghan nationalist sentiment or from fears of reprisals in the future by the triumphant *mojahedin*, it is a significant factor in the guerrilla war.

When the Karmal government resorted in September to a call-up of Afghan men under 35, affecting potentially over a quarter of a million men who had already served their terms as conscripts, it was a measure of the bankruptcy of its strategy.

A dwindling army of less than half its intended strength of 80,000 had failed to recover its morale, in spite (or, indeed, because) of the presence of political commissars and Soviet officers placed to ensure the loyalty of Afghan units. The "popular army" intended to defend the revolution is often unreliable in the field, with the deserters giving over fresh supplies of arms to the *mojahedin*.

Sources of new conscripts to replace deserters, the wounded or those who had completed their terms had almost dried up, with so much of the country out of central control, and so many youths liable to conscription having fled to the mountains or into exile in refugee camps in Pakistan and Iran. At least two and a half million Afghans are now refugees - almost one in six of the total population, constituting the largest refugee problem in the world today.

The effects of the Afghan call-up have been partly counter-productive. Almost at once large numbers of affected Kabulis chose to go into exile or join the opposition

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rather than face conscription a second time over. Among them were young civil servants in other respects loyal to the Karmal government, and other members of the educated classes whose talents are badly needed if a reconstruction of Afghan society is eventually to succeed.

Already at least half of the Afghan intelligentsia, by conservative estimates, had been killed or had left the country since 1978, and a further large exodus would cripple prospects for the future.

Although the call-up will undoubtedly bring in many thousands of unwilling second-time conscripts - enforced as it is by the shooting of those caught evading the press-gangs - the new army is hardly likely to prove any more loyal than the old.

As for the mojahedin, problems exist but morale does not appear to be one of them. The scattered guerrilla groups may be lightly armed, poorly fed on what devastated villages can offer, wearing not army boots but swathes of cloth around their feet - yet they enjoy the solid support of the rural population of Afghanistan.

Although northern and central regions are isolated, and almost entirely dependent on their own scanty resources, the regions bordering Pakistan and Iran are in constant touch with Afghan exile organisations across the borders.

There are bitter rivalries between some of the Afghan partics and fronts based in Peshawar, Quetta or in the Iranian cities of Mashad, Tehran and Tayabad (the district of Khurasan where there are as many as 300,000 Afghan refugees).

Yet the various parties based in exile have effectively channelled foreign aid through Pakistan and Iran into Afghanis-

tan, in the form of small arms, ammunition, food and other supplies when needed. The quantities of aid from the Gulf states, China, Egypt and the US have steadily increased.

The Afghan mojahedin rely on easy access. From Pakistan and Iran into the border territories of Afghanistan run countless tracks which small bands of mojahedin cross and re-cross at will.

The ability of resistance groups to mount sustained attacks on Soviet and Afghan army garrisons in the important western city of Herat, and to the south in Kandahar, depends on well-organised operations linking local guerrilla groups within the cities to centres outside Afghanistan: Herat to Khurasan and Kandahar to the Baluchistan Province of Pakistan.

The North-West Frontier of Pakistan is especially crucial, because it gives access to the most populous and most important Afghan provinces.

These borderlands are generally controlled by tribes rather than police or army units. These tribes are mostly sympathetic to the mojahedin but have come under increasing pressure. Soviet gunships have mined the border trails.

Pressure is being put on the Pakistan authorities too, by frequent strafing of border posts, as well as of Afghan refugee camps, by MiG fighters.

Yet even with the presence of some 80,000 troops and a powerful air force based in Afghanistan, Soviet forces are heavily stretched. The Afghan borders are likely to remain porous, whatever the policies in Kabul - or in Islamabad and Tehran.

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IRAN

'ASAHI' INTERVIEWS NIPC OFFICIAL IN TEHRAN

OW280626 Tokyo ASAHI SHIMBUN in Japanese 24 Nov 81 Morning Edition p 9

[Interview with NIPC President Taheri]

[Text] Tehran Bureau, 23 November--President (Taheri) of the Iranian National Petrochemical Company (NPC) recently granted an interview to ASAHI SHIMBUN Tehran Bureau on problems concerning the Iran-Japan Petrochemical Complex Project (IJPC). During this interview, he hinted at the feasibility of the recent Mitsubishi proposal for scaling down the scope of the project. However, he declared that an investigation of the war damage to the project is the first requisite. The following is a summary of the interview:

[Question] What is your assessment of the Tokyo negotiations?

[Answer] The Iranian Government position is that the Japanese side should come to Iran to search for the way which will enable the two sides to reach agreement through a dialogue and complete the project. On the basis of the previous negotiations (in Tehran), the Japanese side asked us to submit the results of our survey on technical and economic problems, and we did submit them. But the Japanese side demanded that the Iranian Government underwrite the whole cost of the project on the grounds that the Japanese side was unable to make any further investment. We countered by demanding that the Japanese side study the results of the survey conducted by the Iranian side and, on that basis, visit Iran to continue negotiations so that both sides can reach an agreement to carry on the project. Our assessment of the Tokyo negotiations will depend on what move Japan will make.

[Question] Judging that the project has already lost profitability, the Japanese side has proposed a new formula under which "Iran will underwrite all costs whereas Japan will only provide technical cooperation." What do you think?

[Answer] We want to protest to our partners by asking them on what basis they are contending that the project is unprofitable. Since this problem was raised during the previous talks, we proved this time that as far as profitability is concerned, there is nothing to worry about. Then the Japanese side brought up the problem of damage caused by bombing. But without sending an investigation team, how can they say the project has no profitability and will be difficult to carry on? Don't you think it proper for them to first send an investigative team to determine whether or not the project is profitable and whether or not it is possible to carry on the project?

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If the results of the investigation turn out good, the two sides should negotiate on that basis and complete the project by all means. Should the Japanese side ask for compensation on the basis of the investigation, the Iranian Government will be ready to comply. At any rate, investigation comes first.

[Question] The Japanese side is demanding a revision of the basic agreement on the basis of the new formula. What is your opinion?

[Answer] The Iranian Government's position is that problems can be solved within the framework of the existing basic agreement. The Japanese side presented some reasons for desiring to change the 50-50 ratio of investment sharing, but these reasons are not reasonable at all in our eyes. They raised various questions about gas supply, war damage, water supply and housing, and we have answered all these questions. Above all, we have assured them that Japan will not be made to share losses from war damage, and we have also guaranteed profits to them. We believe that problems can be solved under the existing agreement.

[Question] What do you think of the large gap between Japan and Iran in their estimates of the damage?

[Answer] This, too, stems from the fact that the Japanese side has not conducted an on-the-spot investigation. On the other hand, the Iranian estimate does not include the damage done by the sixth bombing (on 19 October). In order to work out an estimate of the damage acceptable to both sides, it is necessary for them to send a joint investigation team. Dedicated to Islamic creed, the Iranian Government will do nothing which will cause its partner to incur a loss.

[Question] The Japanese side is thinking of reducing the scale of the project. What is your comment?

[Answer] We have never received any such proposal yet. That is a problem which should be settled through negotiations according to our practice. If we find this idea to be in the interest of the Islamic Republic, we will act accordingly. What is important is that the petrochemical industry is Iran's key industry and that we should complete IJPC with our Japanese partners and establish closer relations between Iran and Japan.

[Question] Just before your departure from Japan, you met with MITI officials to ask for Japanese cooperation. Did you attend that meeting with possible government-level negotiations in the future in mind?

[Answer] MITI officials said that Mitsui is a private business and the Japanese Government cannot meddle. But it is a fact that the MITI exercised its influence in connection with Japan's exports to the United States and its oil imports. I asked the MITI to exercise similar influence over Mitsui.

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[Question] If its new formula proposal is not accepted, Mitsui is reportedly determined to go so far as to bring action in the international court in order to suspend the project and withdraw from it.

[Answer] I have never heard of that. The Mitsui president said that his company's financial condition does not permit any further investment and he does not want to sever Mitui's relations with us because of that. We feel the same way. We hope that things will not come to that and we believe that problems can be solved through negotiations.

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IRAN

MOJAHEDIN LEADER INTERVIEWED ON VARIOUS ISSUES

London THE MIDDLE EAST in English Nov 81 pp 37-38

[Text] **M**assoud Rajavi is one of the most protected men in the world. Several units of French gendarmes patrol the area around the suburban villa where he lives with former President Bani-Sadr in the small village of Auvers-sur-Oise, 37km from Paris. A boat also patrols the river Oise, and the numbers of all the planes and helicopters which fly over the villa are checked by the police. Visitors must go through two checks by the gendarmes, and a final control procedure by the *Renseignements Généraux* before reaching Rajavi's villa.

Despite all these stresses, Massoud Rajavi, who looks surprisingly young - he is only 34 - is quite relaxed. On the day *The Middle East* interviewed him, he and Bani-Sadr had issued their 'programme for a transitional government', which some press agencies had misinterpreted as the proclamation of a government-in-exile. But, as Rajavi explained in the interview, "I did not form a government-in-exile. I declared the programme of the National Resistance Council, and of its future transitional, temporary government. This government will be constituted in Iran."

□ *The Middle East*: Can you explain the importance of the Mojahedin within the Iranian opposition? Do you hope to overthrow Khomeini's regime and to take over by yourselves?

○ *Rajavi*: I will give you a few figures, and you can draw your own conclusions. Since 20 June, Khomeini has executed more than 2,200 people of whom more than 1,800 were Mojahedin. And this is only the official figure. In reality many more Mojahedin were executed but they had refused to give their real names.

Also, out of a total of 14-15,000 political prisoners, more than 12,000 are Mojahedin.

As for our press, a few months ago our newspaper *Mojahed* had a circulation of

half a million (although this has now dropped), while the circulation of the Islamic Republican Party's paper was about 25,000. We also have a secret radio station inside Iran.

Thus it is evident that the Mojahedin are the most popular, the best organised and the most disciplined political organisation in recent Iranian history. The best proof is that Khomeini rejected my candidacy at the presidential elections, because he was afraid of the support I would get.

In conclusion, we can say that in contemporary Iran there are two main political forces. One is regional, in Kurdistan; and the only other one which is not regional is the Mojahedin: today nearly all the resistance is carried out by our organisation.

But we believe that overthrowing the regime must be the work of all the organisations. Politically, since 1965, we have proved that we do not believe that we alone must govern the country. We believe in democracy. And history has shown that this country cannot be governed by only one group, however strong it is.

The most important difference between the Mojahedin and the Tudeh (pro-Moscow communist) party is that we believe in an organic, inherent relationship between independence and freedom: without freedom, it is impossible to have independence, and without independence, it is impossible to have freedom.

We are not monopolistic, we are not dictators. If you are, you are obliged to lean on a foreign power because you lose the support of the people. This is our main difference with the Monarchists and with Tudeh.

□ Can you tell us who are the main members of the National Resistance Council?

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- ☐ For security reasons, I can give you no names - as yet. Maybe it will be possible in a few weeks.
- ☐ Is the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Dr Ghassemlou a member?
- ☐ We have always supported the internal autonomy of Kurdistan within the framework of the national integrity of Iran. The KDP has prepared an autonomy project which it has submitted to President Bani-Sadr.
- ☐ Have you seen it and do you approve of it?
- ☐ We have already taken the main step of approving the principle of *hukmaktari* (autonomy) and we have time to argue and negotiate the details.
- ☐ In that perspective, are you planning a federal system for the Islamic Democratic Republic of Iran?
- ☐ We are now in a temporary position. The constituent assembly - which will be elected through free general elections - will decide. For ourselves, we believe in a democratic regime which respects the rights of all minorities and nationalities.
- ☐ If you cannot say who are the members of the Council, maybe you can tell us who cannot be a member? What about the Monarchists?
- ☐ Neither the Monarchists nor Tudeh can accept our programme because they do not believe in either of our two main principles: independence and freedom.
- ☐ How can you say that the Monarchists do not believe in independence?
- ☐ Look at the last 75 years of monarchy in Iran. Where was independence then?
- ☐ Who, then, could be a member of the National Resistance Council?
- ☐ All national democratic progressive forces, all real Muslims.
- ☐ Can you explain President Bani-Sadr's position and your own role in the Council?
- ☐ President Bani-Sadr is holding the temporary presidency of the state, and does not belong to any political party. I am responsible for the Council. I am its spokesman and will draw up the government.
- ☐ How do you envisage your struggle against Khomeini's regime?
- ☐ We have a strategy in three stages: first, we had to break the atmosphere of fear and terror. In this, we have already succeeded. The second stage is the organisation of big demonstrations, general strikes. Again, we believe that this regime should fall through the action of the people.
- ☐ What is the third stage?
- ☐ I wish we did not need it, but there is no other solution: it is the actual collapse of the regime.
- ☐ Can you overthrow the regime without physically eliminating Khomeini?
- ☐ We need Khomeini, we need him for a public trial, on television, with all the Iranians as a jury. If there was enough political consciousness, Khomeini could not govern the country as he does. Our problem is to create a democratic regime with stability, so the people must understand why Khomeini is guilty.
- ☐ Aren't you afraid that some people will be quicker than you? Aren't you afraid, for instance, of an "American solution"?
- ☐ The Monarchists and Tudeh exist more in Western public opinion than in Iran. If the Monarchists take power today, how will they keep it tomorrow? With their guns and their money? The Shah had an army, and a Savak. This time, there are no tools for such repression. What can they do when they do not have the people with them?

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IRAQ

MASSIVE DEVELOPMENT PROBLEMS IN NATION CITED

Paris AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI in Arabic No 242 2-8 Oct 81 p 25

[Article: "On the First Anniversary of the War, Iraqi Projects Total \$3 Billion"]

[Text] In September, Iraq celebrated the first anniversary of the outbreak of war with Iran in a special way. While the battles on the front were going on in a manner that had no precedent for a year, the Iraqi Ministry of Industry and other departments were signing new contracts to continue carrying out development projects in the country.

According to this ministry's statistics, Iraq, over the last 12 months, has signed contracts to carry out a number of development projects costing about 1 billion Iraqi dinars (more than \$3 billion).

A person studying these projects, and their circumstances and goals, will arrive at a number of facts and conclusions, among them:

1. The rate of execution of these projects and their preparation and followup have not declined as a result of the impositions made by the war mentality and expenditures on various military areas. Indeed, they have risen in comparison with the level of development and investment activity in the country prior to the outbreak of war. Referring to figures, it is clear that total investment spending in the first half of the current year increased by 118 million Iraqi dinars (more than \$350 million) over its level in the corresponding period of the previous year.
2. These projects are enlarging the infrastructure and directly affect development factors that have the effect of bolstering the production process in the country, in the sense that these are not rapid consumer projects but are aimed rather at building a strong economy which can bear the elements of building itself by itself. We can take many examples from the projects that are being carried out by themselves, including construction of a cement plant in the Karbala' area (100 kilometers southwest of Baghdad) at a cost totalling about \$134 million, with an annual productive capacity of 1 million tons (which can be raised to 2 million tons); construction of a plant for fired brick and eternite at a cost of \$170 million; and start of execution of the massive housing project in the north of the country, whose final costs will come to \$559 million and whose first stage costs will come to \$122.7 million. This stage is under construction. Then there is a project to build the Baghdad subway system, on which agreement has been reached, another

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project to lay out a system of long distance highways totalling about 1,000 kilometers linking Iraq with Syria, Jordan and Kuwait, a third project to back up electric capacity in the country, and a fourth to build three telephone centers in the outskirts of Baghdad.

3. These massive investment expenditures will make Iraq, after the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the second highest country in the Middle East on the list of investment activity expenditure, and as a consequence qualifies it to realize its aspirations under the 5-year plan that is being carried out (1981-86) regarding a shift to a country standing on solid ground within the group of developing countries. With regard to the growth rate in the country, this plan aims at reaching about 35 percent, which is very ambitious. An index based on much evidence in this sphere shows that the ration of investment spending to general state expenditure came to about 70 percent last year, and that the amounts that went for development investment came to \$12 billion last year. The likes of these figures are scarcely seen in what are categorized as developing countries--not to speak of countries that are compelled to devote a large portion of their attention to war affairs.

4. Iraq appears, in spite of everything, to be able to sustain its development plans at their current rate. Statistics show that the volume of its financial reserves comes to \$35 billion. This means that it has a clear ability to spend for a period of at least 2 years in the worst possible and probable conditions of production.

5. Returning to the thinking on spending itself, it appears, as a result of a general theoretical analysis, that Iraq is striving toward activity that transcends the rapid limits of spending in response to immediate needs and is venturing into activity aimed at building a firm productive base that will be sufficient by itself to make the mechanism of the domestic economy run in sound, positive ways.

In the realm of comparison, Iraq appears to be trying to depart from a condition that has plagued developing countries generally, and specifically oil producing countries that show a high rate of spending in non-investment areas which are not beneficial in the long run. Another conspicuous point is represented by the fact that spending on military affairs has not harmed the desire for useful investment spending.

6. Continuing with the same comparison, it seems, on the other side of the battlefield, that Iran finds itself mired one way or another in intensified consumption, consumption which for the most part goes to meet that country's increasing need for food and other basic commodities. This becomes plainly obvious in reviewing the list of Iran's general expenditures, all at a time when work on essential structural projects has stopped, or nearly stopped.

It is clear that the reason for that goes beyond the mere drop in Iran's revenues resulting from the suspension of oil production, followed by its resumption at a low level over a long period, increased military expenditures, and continued civil war, which have led to a paralysis of the sectors. The reason for this consumer orientation, with no feasible spending, is represented in particular by the absence of what in the economic lexicon is known as a plan. The matter is particularly related to the state of political instability, lack of security and an absence of clarity in the country's economic future, which has caused it to neglect all long-range planning.

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In brief, the Iraq-Iran war, which has gone on for a year as of today, has paved the way for a clearer reading of the resources of this important oil region and its potential for future progress.

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IRAQ

TARIQ 'AZIZ DISCUSSES RELATIONS WITH FRANCE, FUTURE PROSPECTS

Paris AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI in Arabic No 237, 28 Aug-3 Sep 81 pp 35-39

[Interview with Tariq 'Aziz, Member of Iraq's Revolutionary Command Council and Deputy Prime Minister by Walid Abu Dhahr; in Paris: "Tariq 'Aziz Tells AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI, 'Syrian Troops Must Get Out of Lebanon' "]

[Text] "The results of my talks with Mitterand have been good; France will rebuild the nuclear reactor."
"The scandal of Israeli weapons to Iran proved that the Arabs who took Iran's side were wrong."
"The Soviet position is better: Syrians are still as biased as they were, and Libyans promised neutrality."
"Religious movements have a role to play, and they have their special aspects, but they will fail in government because they will divide the Arab nation."
"The Arab Nationalism Movement is stronger despite setbacks and attacks from the religious right and the Marxist left."

Tariq 'Aziz is a member of Iraq's Revolutionary Command Council and deputy prime minister. He holds a prominent political, official and intellectual position in the regime and in the party. In addition, he performed brilliantly in the missions he undertook outside Iraq. These missions had sought to deal with and settle questions and problems of considerable importance in Iraq's bilateral relations or its national interest.

The talks which the senior Iraqi official held in Paris with President Mitterand and with senior French officials were spotlighted last week in the Arab world and throughout the world. AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI took advantage of Mr Tariq 'Aziz's visit to the French capital to conduct this comprehensive interview with him. The interview covered Iraqi-French relations, especially with regard to nuclear cooperation, and it also covered topical questions such as the dispute between Iraq and Iran and the Lebanese crisis.

The interview went beyond the traditional framework in which journalists usually conduct such interviews with Arab officials to cover intellectual questions as well as hypothetical political questions inasmuch as Tariq

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'Aziz's time allowed. He spoke about the present and the future of the religious phenomenon in the Arab world and the attacks that the course of Arab nationalism was being subjected to from the religious right and from the Marxist left. He tried to respond accurately and candidly to questions about sensitive and crucial issues, and he promised that the discussion would be resumed soon in Baghdad.

This interview with Mr Tariq 'Aziz took place at the residence of the Honorable Mr Nuri Isma'il al-Wa'is, Iraq's ambassador in Paris. The interview, which lasted almost 2 hours, took place after the member of the Revolutionary Command Council and the deputy prime minister had concluded his talks with President Mitterand; with his prime minister, Mr Pierre Mauroy; and with a number of French ministers among whom were the ministers of foreign affairs and the minister of defense.

I admit at the outset that the interview took place in a limited period of time due to the tight schedule of the talks. However, the generosity of Mr Tariq 'Aziz made it possible for us to expand the interview and to deal with this large number of questions.

[Question] What are your impressions now that you've visited France and conducted talks with President Francois Mitterand and other French officials?

[Answer] Ever since the French Socialist party and President Mitterand came to power in France, President Saddam Husayn and the leadership in Iraq have wanted to become acquainted with President Mitterand and the new leadership in France. This is because we appreciate the importance of existing relations between the two countries in numerous essential fields.

Our preference from the very beginning was that this meeting take place after sufficient time had elapsed so that the new leadership in France would have been able to find out the facts about France's relations with other countries, among which are relations with Iraq.

It is normal for any new government and any new president who comes into office to need some time before beginning to make contacts on the international scene. Even when the Zionist attack on the nuclear reactor took place last 7 June, we did not find it necessary to contact France right away. We preferred to contact France at a time that we thought would be convenient and that the new French leadership as well found convenient.

On that basis we contacted the new French leaders late last July and told them that President Saddam Husayn wished to send me to France to meet them and to explain to them directly our views of relations between Iraq and France as we saw them since they were established several years ago, and as we see them at present and in the future. I would also discuss with the new French leaders some of the new matters [pertaining to] cooperation between the two countries.

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The French leaders responded promptly to our wishes, and an agreement was reached to set the date for the time in which the visit took place.

I met almost all the leading French officials during my visit to Paris. Among those I met were President Mitterand; Prime Minister, Mr Pierre Mauroy; and the ministers of foreign affairs, defense, planning, scientific research and technology, foreign trade and education. I also met Mr Pierre Joxe, president of the Socialist Parliamentary Group. He is one of the leaders of the Socialist party.

My impression of the visit is that President Mitterand, the prime minister and all the French officials I met were cordial. They showed that they had a profound understanding of the nature of existing relations between Iraq and France, and they understood the necessity of those relations to the fundamental interests of the two countries. We concurred with them that that relationship was also consistent with the aspirations of the Iraqi and Arab people, on the one hand, and with the aspirations of the French people, on the other, in strengthening the policy of independence.

I assured French officials that if we wanted to summarize the essential nature of the policy to which Iraq is inclined in building international relations and in building long-term relations with France, we could do so in one word: independence. Iraq is extremely intent on its independence, and it advocates Arab independence most forcefully. Iraq believes that its cooperation with France in all vital areas strengthens this independence and also strengthens France's independent course. France's cooperation with Iraq and with countries that are strongly bent on [maintaining] their independent course enables France to strengthen its independent course.

I found that French leaders were in agreement with this understanding of the relationship, and they assured me that they wished to continue relations with Iraq. I can say that the impression I have of this visit is that it was a good visit and that it constitutes a new step in the continuing close relations between us and France.

[Question] As far as the nuclear reactor in particular is concerned, has an agreement to rebuild the reactor been reached? Will nuclear cooperation between the two countries also continue as it had been in the past?

[Answer] As I said, I dealt with relations between Iraq and France in my talks with French officials. These relations include the field of nuclear cooperation. French officials affirmed that they were prepared to resume cooperation in all the fields in which we had been cooperating in the past, including nuclear cooperation.

I dealt with these matters in a general framework, and I did not go into the details because this is not the task which President Saddam Husayn assigned to me. When we agree on the general framework and on the foundations of future relations, our colleagues, the officials in Iraq and the French officials in question can get together and resume the discussions. But as far as discussions about a general framework and general principles are concerned, the meetings and results were satisfactory.

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An Agreement To Rebuild the Reactor

[Question] Can we say then that there was agreement to build the reactor and to continue cooperation in the nuclear field?

[Answer] Yes. There was agreement about continued cooperation in the nuclear field.

[Question] Was there French emphasis during the talks that if nuclear cooperation between the two countries is resumed, Iraq would have to provide guarantees [and meet] conditions that it would continue its nuclear activities for peaceful purposes?

[Answer] The French leaders have affirmed that their cooperation with Iraq is not based on the notion of conditions. As an independent country, we do not accept conditions for dealing with any other country in any field whatsoever. But when two parties cooperate, each party shares with the other what each needs and what it thinks is appropriate for the progress of this cooperation.

When we discussed this subject, there was understanding on both sides. We understand the French position well, and I discovered that the French understand the Iraqi position.

The way we see things from our perspective is that we cooperated with France in the nuclear field, and the nature of that cooperation was peaceful. We signed several agreements in the past regulating this cooperation, setting down and defining what the other party would call "guarantees" it would need so that this program would be operated in a peaceful manner.

As far as I know, and I can affirm this absolutely and positively, ever since cooperation between Iraq and France began and ever since cooperation between Iraq, other countries and the Commission on Nuclear Energy began, Iraq has not been charged of a single violation of the agreements it signed and is abiding by. The French leaders know this.

[Question] There was some talk, for example, about France's intention to provide [Iraq] with a kind of nuclear fuel known as "caramel" which can only be used in peaceful activities.

[Answer] I did not hear this expression at all during my stay in Paris. As I said, we agreed on the general framework and on the principles. The technical people will begin their contacts at an appropriate time to look into how the cooperation will be resumed. They will determine the details.

[Question] When will these technical talks take place?

[Answer] Soon.

[Question] Can you be specific?

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[Answer] We did not agree on a specific date, but this will take place soon.

[Question] How much time will it take to build the nuclear reactor that was destroyed?

[Answer] I personally do not know. I do not have a precise idea.

[Question] Are there still bombs which were dropped by the Israelis on the nuclear establishments that have not exploded?

[Answer] Yes. There are still explosives in the old building or the old location of the reactor.

[Question] One bomb?

[Answer] I don't know how many unexploded bombs there are, but I do know that there are explosives there and that [the building] is not suitable for operations.

[Question] [Is it true that] the second and the smaller of the reactors was not hit?

[Answer] Both reactors are in the same location.

[Question] Does your satisfaction with the results of your talks in the nuclear field extend to the results of your talks in the field of weapons also?

[Answer] Yes, we agreed to continue [our] cooperation in the military field also.

[Question] Was an agreement reached on new and specific weapons contracts?

[Answer] No. I discussed general lines. Naturally, when there is an agreement in principle on the part of any leadership to resume cooperation, this means that the competent agencies can pursue this cooperation and sign the contracts they wish to sign.

[Question] Did your talks deal with the matter of oil?

[Answer] When I met President Mitterand, I told him that France had understood Iraq's wishes and its 1972 decision to nationalize its basic oil resources. I told him that we greatly appreciated this position which helped the nationalization process succeed. It was a major historical operation. I told him that it was from that time that the prospects for the new relations between Iraq and France, which I had described, had begun.

We would like relations between Iraq and France to be special. This entails that we as well as the French make pledges to [this] friendship.

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I informed French leaders that since they had dealt with our needs with a spirit of understanding and a positive manner, we would deal with their needs in the field of oil and in other fields with the same view and spirit.

[Question] Iraqi oil production has declined because of the war. Is France still receiving the high ratio of Iraqi oil it was receiving before the war?

[Answer] Iraq is now producing less oil than it was producing before the war. But in marketing its oil Iraq gives priority to the countries with which Iraq has obligations. France is one of those countries. Naturally Iraq is not France's only source of oil; it has other sources. I do not know what is the difference between France's need [for oil] and what it gets from Iraq. I do not have detailed figures about the volume of Iraqi oil sales to France, but the oil that is exported to France is also premium oil.

[Question] Did your talks deal with the subject of starting a dialogue and setting up relations between the Arab Socialist Ba'th party and the ruling Socialist party in France?

[Answer] The nature of the conversation I had with Mr Pierre Joxe was political, intellectual and cultural. But naturally, our meeting was not a lengthy one. I agreed with President Mitterand that relations between the Arab Socialist Ba'th party and the French Socialist party were to be developed. I expressed this wish, and he was enthusiastic about it.

[Question] Let us go back to the subject of rebuilding the nuclear reactor. Saudi Arabia announced that it was prepared to finance the construction process. Does Iraq have a specific position regarding this Saudi wish?

[Answer] President Saddam Husayn responded to that at his recent press conference. You may refer to the text of his statement. The essence of what he said was that Iraq appreciates Saudi Arabi's wish, but that as far as we are concerned we have no problem with financing.

[Question] Do you believe that the Saudi offer was an attempt to make up for the fact that Israeli airplanes had infiltrated Saudi air space despite the presence of the early warning and observation airplanes, the AWACS airplanes?

[Answer] I prefer not to go into this subject. We are mindful of our fraternal relations with our Arab brothers, and we do not want to talk about anything in this area.

[Question] There is an American bid to declare the Middle East area an area free of nuclear weapons. Egypt and Israel are now supporting this bid. Where does Iraq stand on this matter?

[Answer] If the intent of this proposal is to destroy the nuclear weapons which Israel has and to prevent Israel from producing nuclear weapons in

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the future, we have no objections to stopping the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the area. Basically, we do not want nuclear weapons to proliferate in the area. Therefore, we signed the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, and we still believe in non-proliferation.

But if the intent is to cover up the Zionist military nuclear program and prevent the Arab countries, including Iraq, from continuing their acquisition of nuclear technology, we will resist this plan.

[Question] Israel is saying that it is prepared to accept the proposal provided that it achieves peace with the Arabs.

[Answer] This is a fallacy. It is Israel or the Zionist entity that is attacking the Arabs. This is [Israel's] justification for the continuous Zionist aggression on the Arab nation. An aggressor does not look for guarantees; it is the attacked that is to look for guarantees.

We Are Asking That Syrian Troops Get Out of Lebanon

[Question] There is another point in the talks that attracts attention. The joint communique indicated that there was an agreement in opinions on the question of Lebanon. What is the substance of this agreement in opinion between Iraq and France?

[Answer] We agreed in general on the unity of Lebanon's territory, on the need for security in Lebanon to prevail and on the need for respect for Lebanon's sovereignty and its constitutional authorities. We believe in these points, and I found that the French were intent on them.

[Question] In your analysis of the serious events and developments in Lebanon, what are your thoughts and your views on the future of this Arab country?

[Answer] I talk about this matter with total candor. There are internal factors in Lebanon that are causing the dispute. However, experience has shown that these factors are not the most powerful reasons behind what Lebanon is suffering from at present.

The strongest reason [behind Lebanon's present difficulties] is foreign intervention, colonialist intervention, the superpowers, the continuing Zionist aggressions against Lebanon and the abnormal Syrian presence there. A situation may develop in which an Arab country may need the support of another Arab country, even if the nature of that support had to do with security. I do not refute such a need, and it must be met in the context of national responsibility.

However, the Syrian presence in Lebanon has become abnormal. Syria's presence in Lebanon began and continued in an abnormal manner. Excluding, of course, colonialist and Zionist influences, if the Syrian presence in Lebanon is handled properly, many matters in Lebanon can be operated in a better manner. I would think that if Syrian troops were to get out of

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Lebanon, a sound relationship between the Lebanese and the Palestinians can be established. Such a relationship would be better than the one which exists at present because the Syrian presence is complicating matters and giving problems crisis proportions.

I am calling for the ouster of Syrian troops from Lebanon, and not just because we have a quarrel with the Syrian regime. We had asked the Syrian regime to get out of Lebanon when we were on good terms with it after the Joint Arab Action Agreement was signed. We told the Syrian regime that national interest required that the Syrian army leave Lebanon and that a suitable solution for Lebanon's problem be looked into. We also told the Syrian regime that the presence of Syrian troops in Lebanon spoiled these troops. It eroded their effectiveness and made them incapable of assuming their combat responsibilities as an army which is supposed to oppose the Zionist enemy.

The fact that scores of thousands of Syrians have gone into Lebanon under the auspices of deterrent forces brings them back to Lebanon as policemen. I personally overheard President Hafiz al-Asad himself saying, "Yes, our soldiers in Lebanon have turned into policemen." Regardless of the nature of its regime and of our differences with that regime, Syria is a confrontation state, and its army is supposed to be in the best state of mobilization and readiness for a military confrontation. If members of this army were to turn into policemen by the thousands, that shift signifies that this army has lost its combat ability.

It is then in Syria's interests, from a national perspective, and it is in the interests of Lebanon and the Palestinian cause that the Syrian position in Lebanon be rearranged in a manner that would allow Lebanon to be unified and stable and have the ability to deal with the Palestinian presence [in its territories] on a proper basis. There is to be a fraternal agreement between the Palestinians and the Lebanese, and each party is to respect the other. Such an agreement is to enable the Palestinians in Lebanon to continue their struggle for their cause.

[Question] With regard to the Iraqi-Iranian struggle, do you believe that the fact that former Iranian president Abol Hasan Bani-Sadr has stepped down and the fact that the religious establishment is now directly in power are making it easier or more difficult to reach an agreement between Iraq and Iran?

[Answer] The fact is that to be fair and precise, we would have to say that the presence of Mr Bani Sadr as president of the Iranian Republic was not an obstacle toward reaching a settlement in the dispute. Among the leaders of Iran he was the one most willing to look into the opportunities for peace.

This does not mean that all his opinions and his positions were acceptable and satisfactory as far as we are concerned. However, the truth must be told to be fair to the man and to his positions. He was the one most willing to join the agencies that were looking for opportunities for peace:

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[these were] the delegation of the Islamic Conference, the delegation of the non-aligned [countries] and Mr Olaf Palma the United Nations' envoy.

No one can say that existing conditions after his removal from office are more favorable for peace. However, there is a general, logical judgment that when the government in any country is united, that government is more capable of producing peace or managing a war.

In an abstract sense this opinion is sound, but who can vouch for the application of this opinion in Iran? Many things are happening there in an illogical fashion, and no one knows the nature of things there now. Is there a unified government in Iran, and is there a center for decision making?

The world does not know about these matters, and we too do not know about them. I would think, and this is speculation, of course, that if there were a unified government in Iran and if there were anyone capable of analyzing the situation, of drawing conclusions and finding out the truth about what is happening there and the truth about the military situation, he would actually be looking now for opportunities for peace with us, not only out of concern for Iran, but also because what Iraq is asking for is basically not much.

All that Iraq is asking for is [recognition of] its sovereignty over Shatt al-'Arab. This is a historical right that was forcibly taken away from Iraq in 1975 by the Shah. Iraq is also asking Iran to recognize its sovereignty over the territories that have been recognized as Iraqi in all agreements about which there are no legal problems. However, the Iranians have continued to occupy these lands, and they did not execute the agreement.

Iraq also has a national demand. It is asking that the three islands in the Gulf be restored to Arab sovereignty. These islands, as everybody knows, were occupied by an armed force with the collusion of the colonialist power.

If leadership such as that I described were available in Iran, those leaders would have assumed a peace initiative as soon as possible, and they would have responded to the attempts that the three aforementioned agencies made to achieve a peaceful, just and honorable settlement [to the problem].

We have always been affirming that a settlement must be fair and honorable for both parties because we believe that it is essential that a settlement be fair and honorable. Iran is Iraq's neighbor, and we do not wish to create a historical hostility between the two countries for the future. They attacked us; they threatened our sovereignty and our nation; they usurped our rights; and we had to respond. This is normal and essential. But we do not want to have a future, long-term state of hostility between Iraq and Iran.

On 28 September 1980 in his first speech after battles between the two

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countries were expanded President Saddam Husayn said that we wanted to establish good, neighborly and peaceful relations with Iran. These relations were to be built on mutual respect of both countries' legitimate interests and on their mutual respect for each other's sovereignty. President Saddam Husayn affirmed that Iraq entertains no ambitions in Iran.

The Injustice of Close Friends

[Question] Some of the Arabs' close friends were unfair to Iraq when the armed struggle with Iran began. But now after Iranian intentions were revealed and after the fact that Israel provided arms to Iran was exposed, have Iraq's close friends corrected their critical position of Iraq and their support for Iran?

[Answer] Syria's position has not changed at all. Regarding Libya's position, we told Mr 'Abd-al-Salam Jalud when he visited Baghdad recently that normal relations between us and Libya could not be established if Libya continues to ally itself with Iran against Iraq. The least we can ask for is that Libya stay neutral in the dispute even though we cannot understand that an Arab can remain neutral in a dispute between an Arab country and another country. However, in the context of current Arab reality, we would accept neutrality.

We sensed that Libyan leaders were inclined to favor this trend. I personally cannot say that the aid is continuing or that it has been suspended. The Libyans denied that they were giving [Iran] any aid. This is what they said, and it is their business to confirm or deny this matter.

The other parties that assumed positions against Iraq in its dispute with Iran have not admitted their error, not to our knowledge. Some of them may have stopped or toned down their campaigns.

[Question] Are you referring to some of the Palestinian parties?

[Answer] Maybe. Palestinians and non-Palestinians. The scandal surfaced. We were saying from the beginning that it was Iran that attacked Iraq and that we were responding to the attack against us. Then we said that the Iranian attack on Iraq was a Zionist plot to undermine Iraq; it was a plot that primarily benefited Zionism. [Its purpose was] to undermine Iraq and to distract it away from its national missions. We said that there had to be behind this aggression an alliance between the regime in Iran or some of its factions and the Zionist entity, and material facts have confirmed that. A few months after the war it was confirmed that the Zionist enemy was supplying Iran with weapons or that Iranians were buying weapons from the Zionist entity.

This is not just information from the press. President Bani-Sadr, Iran's former president and general commander of the armed forces stated 2 or 3 days ago that Iranians were actually buying weapons from Israel.

Then what are they saying now, those who wronged and accused Iraq? They

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cannot say anything to persuade anyone. The scandal that exposed Iranian-Zionist cooperation is also their scandal. It signifies that there was direct or indirect collusion with Zionism against an Arab state which is supposed to be and is backing what they claim is their desire for liberation and for resisting the Zionist entity.

If we were to assume that there was no collusion, [the cooperation that was revealed] would be an indication of short-sightedness and of an error in political thinking. It would mean that those people are actually not suitable for making evaluations on major national issues and for determining the proper position on them.

This is the conclusion that one can derive from these positions. If those who had stood beside Iran against Iraq had done so on the basis of honest principles and then discovered their error, the dictates of principle and honor would have demanded that they criticize themselves and say, "We made a mistake in analyzing and diagnosing the situation. We are now re-evaluating matters and we are saying that Iraq was the victim of a foreign attack in which Zionism played at least a part.

But they did not say that, and this means that their position was based neither on principle nor on honor. The scandal touches those who supported Iran at Iraq's expense.

[Question] How do you explain this agreement to treat Iraq as an enemy and to support Iran?

[Answer] My explanation for that is the same as that which I told President Mitterand when I described the nature of relations between Iraq and France: independence. When one is independent in this world, one has to pay a very high price. The superpowers do not want to see an independent and a strong Arab entity develop. It is the followers of the superpowers who are carrying out the campaign of insults, accusations and conspiracies on behalf of the superpowers or in conjunction with them.

They thought that Iranian aggression on Iraq would weaken Iraq and its independent policy and that this would force it to look for an international cover here or there. The subordinates of the international front which Iraq would join would then praise it, and Iraq would separate itself from the subordinates of the other front. However, thank God, we did win the campaigns and conspiracies [launched against us by] both parties.

[Question] Has the Soviet Union changed the position it assumed when the armed struggle with Iran broke out?

[Answer] Relations are now better [than they were].

[Question] Does this improvement in relations include sending Soviet weapons to Iraq?

[Answer] I will only say that relations are better. This means that in general relations are better than they were in the past.

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Arabism, Islam and the Religious Regime in Iran

[Question] Let us try to shift the discussion to some theoretical issues since you are the man of thought in the Iraqi Revolution. .

Mr Tariq 'Aziz interrupted me.

[Answer] No, I am one of those who contribute in this area. The man of thought in the Revolution is President Saddam Husayn.

[Question] Let us begin first with what we can call the religious phenomenon. What is your explanation of it? Do you believe that in light of what happened in Iran there is a future for the religious expansion in the Arab world?

[Answer] Iraq became aware of this phenomenon from the beginning. President Saddam Husayn wrote about it after the party was created in 1968 and the need emerged to draw up a theory for action, as it is called, so as to put the principles into practice. The president wrote a book entitled, "Nazrah fi al-Din wa al-Turath [A View of Religion and Heritage], and the book dealt with this problem. The president discussed this subject before the Khomeyni phenomenon emerged in Iran.

We see no conflict between Arab nationalism and Islam. On the contrary there is a special relationship between them. As we see it, the movement of Arab Nationalism is closely related to Islam as a religion, as [a system of] values, as a human message and as a message of justice.

[Question] And to Islam as a system of government?

[Answer] No. Let me explain that. This is the difference between our view and the view held by religious parties and by some of the religious movements such as those that took over power in Iran. These parties and movements want to establish a political, social and judicial system on a purely religious basis.

This is not how we see things. We believe in establishing a society that is national in the context of a single country and ethnic in the context of the Arab homeland. This society would consider Islam to be its basic way of life, but it would apply the principles of Islam in the context of the present age and according to its needs and exigencies.

President Saddam Husayn explained this problem carefully in his book. We believe that we succeeded in accomplishing this in Iraq: we've built a national society, with an ethnic Arab identity that gives this status to Islam.

But consider the Iranian experience, and you will find that it has in fact failed. Those who took part in it are now saying that this course is not the course that would realize for them what they believe the Islamic Revolution could realize for them. Such statements are being made by Bani-Sadr,

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by Mas'ud Rajavi, the leader of the Islamic Socialist Majahedin-e-Khalq organization, and by many others who took part in bringing about the change in Iran. Khomeyni and the clergymen were not the only ones who brought about the change in Iran. All these people took part in it.

In my judgment then the course that the present Iranian leadership is pursuing has no future in Iran or in any of the other Islamic countries.

[Question] And the Arab countries as well?

[Answer] Precisely in the Arab countries. For here basically there is no conflict between Arabism and Islam. In Iran there was a blatant conflict between the Shah's course and Islam, and there will be a conflict between any ethnic Persian course and Islam, especially if that course is ethnic and chauvinistic and not an open, humanitarian and nationalistic course.

An ethnic, chauvinistic, Persian course considers Islam an Arab religion that was forced on Persian nationals and overthrew the old Persian civilization. Islam, however, is the product of Arab culture and its genius. It is also a divine message that was disseminated, interpreted and put into practice by Arab leaders. The Koran is [also] in Arabic. All these are factors that create no conflict between Arabism and Islam. However, if this delicate problem is not dealt with, it may create a conflict between Islam and some ethnic tendencies that are racist and chauvinistic and can be found in some of the Islamic countries.

Therefore, I do not believe that the religious movement in the Arab homeland has a future in the sense that it can set up a model like the Iranian model. However, movements that believe in Islam as a way of life can play a positive role in resisting colonialism, social injustice and dictatorial regimes, and they may play an effective and a prominent role in Arab, Islamic society because they concentrate on the principles and teachings of Islam.

But if these movements wanted to assume power and to impose their standards on a temporary basis, they will fail in my judgment because they will have to fall back into sectarianism, as President Saddam Husayn indicated when he dealt with the problem of religion and heritage. When religious movements fall back into sectarianism, they divide the people.

Thus these movements will not have a unifying nature as did the essential nature of Islam. Islam unified the Arab nation and then unified a group of nations that adopted Islam in the context of a single Islamic state with a single faith.

Now if the way of life of religious parties and movements were to be put into practice, a retreat into sectarianism will result. Accordingly, this would lead to division and fragmentation and not to unification. And herein lies the danger for the Arab homeland which needs someone to unify it; it does not need someone to split it apart. The fragmentation and division which the Arab nation is suffering from at the present time is a serious

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disease, and all sincere Arabs must struggle to unify [the people in each] single country and then to unify the Arab nation.

[Question] Is the pitfall of sectarianism the only flaw or shortcoming of religious movements, or are they suffering from something that is more significant, namely, the inability to present Islam in a manner that is consistent and congruent with the requirements and the needs of the age?

[Answer] I am not very well informed about all the theoretical works and programs of religious movements in the Arab homeland in order to be fair. If I were informed, I would have identified those that were closer to or more remote from the spirit of the age.

There is also another reason: most of these movements are secret and their programs are neither proclaimed nor made available in a democratic discussion as the thought and program of the Ba'th party was discussed for many years. The program of the Ba'th party was known to many people who were able to discuss it and to determine their positions on it. But if we were to consider the Iranian experience, we would find that it is very far away from the spirit of the age.

The National Course Is Stronger despite Setbacks

[Question] The course of nationalism is being subjected to intense attacks from two sides: from the religious right which is accusing it of conflicting with Islam; and from the Marxist left which is stating that nationalism as a stage has come to an end. What do you think of these attacks? Is it true that nationalism was a stage that ended with the end of Nasirism, for example, or rather with the death of Jamal 'Abd-al-Nasir?

[Answer] The movement of Arab Nationalism did not in fact begin with 'Abd-al-Nasir; it began scores of years before him. However, under the leadership of 'Abd-al-Nasir Arab nationalism gained additional power and momentum. There are justifications for Arab nationalism in Arab history and in Arab society, and these justifications did not disappear with the departure of 'Abd-al-Nasir. They are still the more dominant factors in Arab reality.

What the communists in particular are saying or what those who claim to be Marxists are saying--I do not wish to call them Marxists because they are not exactly that--proves [their] inability to understand the Arab reality and to analyze it scientifically and correctly. Accordingly, it proves [their] inability to offer the programs that would actually lead to the realization of a revolution that is more mature and more complete in the Arab homeland.

You can look at the Arab homeland and find that these movements are losing their popular support and alienating themselves from the masses every day. This is an indication of the fact that their logic and their view of Arab nationalism are erroneous and far from the truth.

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The case is the same with religious movements. If they deal with Arab nationalism in this manner, they will fail. If they deal with Arab nationalism in the manner al-Ba'th party dealt with it, they will have the positive role that I referred to a little while ago. In other words, they are not to place themselves in a position of conflict with the movement of Arab nationalism. They can have their own character in the context of the general national struggle for liberation, for unity and for the establishment of social justice. In this case they can play a positive role.

The movement of Arab nationalism has been hit by setbacks, but these setbacks did not cause the movement to lose the revolutionary, progressive, humanistic and socialist content of its justifications.

We believe that the experiment we are setting up in Iraq constitutes an accomplishment from which the Arab masses can benefit. This means that the program of the Arab revolutionary movement, which has a humanistic, progressive and socialist content is a program that can be put into practice. It is a program that can survive, prosper and flourish. Thus what succeeds in Iraq on that level can succeed in other Arab countries.

It may be said that there are other regimes in the Arab homeland, and they are existing. But there is a difference between an existing regime and a regime whose program is successful, that is, a regime whose political, social, economic, intellectual and cultural program is successful, progressive and prospering. This kind of regime is a model that can be applied elsewhere, but an existing regime that has not yet fallen is a model that is not likely to live and, accordingly, not likely to be applied elsewhere. Therefore, we are optimistic about the future of the movement of Arab nationalism.

The purpose of the siege we are suffering now is to strangle this experiment and to destroy these notions that the movement of Arab nationalism entertains. However, the success of this experiment and Iraq's success in resisting the Iranian aggression whose nature was very complex because it tried to give its aggression an Islamic character, means that this program succeeded and is therefore capable of being replicated.

We Practiced Self-Criticism in Iraq and in the Party

[Question] You referred to setbacks suffered by the movement of Arab nationalism. What is the responsibility of regimes and national movements in bringing about these setbacks? For example, what was the responsibility of the Ba'th party and the responsibility of Nasirism in that?

[Answer] In my judgment this is a subject that requires lengthy investigation. I am not trying to dodge the question here, but I will try to deal with it briefly. I emphasize that brevity in such cases may not be consistent with the accuracy that is required. However, I will give specific indications, and we can later discuss this matter more exhaustively.

Analysts say that all setbacks suffered by revolutionary movements and

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regimes have two factors: a subjective factor and an objective factor. the subjective factor refers to the responsibility that falls on the shoulders of the party, if a party is being referred to, or the regime, if the regime is being referred to. The objective factor includes many ingredients: economic and social conditions, interventions by foreign powers, colonialist conspiracies, and so on.

The subjective and objective factors [that played a part in] the setbacks that befell the revolutionary movement and the movement of Arab nationalism are indistinguishable. Anyone who blames imperialism, Zionism and reactionaries only for the setbacks is quite mistaken. In fact, he would be covering up the truth. Anyone who says that the reason for the setback is a subjective factor would not be providing a comprehensive analysis.

However, in our experience in the Ba'th party we used to give the subjective factor greater importance than the objective factor. This was because we assumed that colonialism, Zionism and reactionaries were the enemies of the movement of Arab nationalism. Therefore, the forces of the revolution had to take precautions against such a conspiracy and they were not to blame the enemies of the movement at the outset for failure.

We say quite frankly, for example, that the principal reason for the failure of our 1963 experience was the subjective factor. We were responsible for the failure. This does not mean that there was no conspiracy, because there was a vigorous conspiracy. However, we are the ones to assume responsibility [for the failure] because we failed to put our program into practice in the manner that was called for.

What confirms this is the fact that we, the Ba'th party in Iraq, had another revolutionary experiment 5 years later in the same country and under the same objective circumstances. Colonialism, Zionism and reactionary forces were hostile, and the Arab climate was less favorable than it was in 1963, but we succeeded because the subjective factor was available. That is, we had the maturity and the ability to deal with the objective circumstances wisely, deliberately and patiently. We had the historical leadership which we did not have in the previous period.

Briefly, this is my view of matters, and what applies to us applies to other experiences.

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ISRAEL

HEBRON MAYOR RAPS INCREASED ISRAELI SETTLEMENT

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[By Patrick Massey]

[Excerpts] Hebron, West Bank, 5 Nov (Reuter)--The acting mayor of Hebron today accused Israeli occupation authorities of plotting to create a corridor of Jewish settlements through the heart of this teeming Arab city.

"They want to link up their settlement in the middle of Hebron with Qiryat Arba' (the major Jewish settlement on the edge of the town) and drive out Arab families in this part," said acting Mayor Mustafa 'Abd al-Nabi Natshah.

In an interview with Reuters, Mr al-Natshah said the Arab population had been angered by the recent advance of creeping Jewish settlement in Hebron.

Last Saturday a Jewish settler was stabbed and slightly wounded in Hebron's Casbah marketplace, an attack which brought vigorous Israeli reprisals.

After arresting two teenagers on suspicion of the attack, Israeli forces bundled their families out of their homes and blew the houses up. An apartment belonging to the family of a third youth suspected of complicity was sealed up with concrete.

"This has left about 35 people homeless just as the winter is setting in," Mr al-Natshah said.

The latest step in the takeover of buildings in Hebron came when Israeli soldiers moved into the Usama Ibn Murhith school after the stabbing on Saturday and declared it closed indefinitely.

"The 700 pupils now have to go to school three kilometers (two miles) away," Mr al-Natshah said. "I protested to the military governor but was told the school was needed so that Israeli soldiers could protect Jewish settlers passing by in the area.

"We are afraid that eventually the soldiers will leave and the school will be handed over to Jewish civilians," he added.

"We believe the plan is to increase settlement along a path that takes in the tomb of Abraham and extends to Qiryat Arba'," Mr al-Natshah said.

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Some Arab houses close to the settlements have been ordered closed for security reasons, Mr al-Natshah said. "All the time pressure on housing is growing worse and we are not permitted to build fresh homes outside the city boundaries. We fear that more and more people may be forced to leave Hebron.

"When I complained to the military governor he told me that my complaints had only stirred up anger among Arab residents. He told me not to protest any more," the acting mayor added.

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SAUDI ARABIA

SAUDIS REPORTEDLY COMMITTED TO DIPLOMATIC RECOGNITION OF USSR

PM150929 London THE OBSERVER in English 15 Nov 81 p 10

[By Helga Graham]

[Text] Saudi Arabia has committed itself to the diplomatic recognition of the Soviet Union, say highly placed Arab sources.

An announcement may come about the time of the Arab summit conference, due to take place in Morocco this month.

Saudi Arabia has had no diplomatic relations with Moscow since the Soviet mission was expelled in 1936. So far Kuwait is the only Arab state in the Gulf which has relations with Russia.

The strategy being prepared calls for the reintegration of the Soviet Union in the Middle East quest for a peace settlement, from which it was excluded when al-Sadat went to Jerusalem in November 1977.

The hoped-for advantage of such a formula would be to reconcile the radical Arab states of the 'steadfastness front'--Iraq, Syria, Algeria, Libya and South Yemen--to the eight-point Saudi peace project.

The Saudi initiative has found differing degrees of favour with the Europeans, the moderate Arabs and the Americans and has been rejected by Isarel. The Arab radicals have remained aloof and suspicious.

The assassination of President al-Sadat changed the situation. The circumstances of his death made the moderates look uneasily at their own public opinion and seemingly lent weight to the radicals' argument that Arabs can never expect an acceptable solution of the Palestinian question from the Americans.

The diplomatic breakthrough came finally when Yasir 'Arafat, the Palestinian leader, and an Algerian delegation recently visited Jiddah.

'Arafat had just been to Moscow and the Algerian delegation had passed through Iraq, Syria and Libya. Prince Saud, the Saudi foreign minister, made a public statement to the effect that it was neutral for the Russians to play a role in the Middle East--privately, the Saudi diplomatic recognition of the Soviet Union was agreed on.

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TUNISIA

AHMED MESTIRI'S PERSONALITY, CAREER, PROSPECTS DISCUSSED

Paris JEUNE AFRIQUE in French No 1087, 4 Nov 81 pp 35-36, 38

[Article by Souhayr Belhassen: "Ahmed Mestiri, or the Apprenticeship of the Opposition"]

[Text] In opposition to Bourguiba, but a moderate opposition despite his "bravado" and controversial statements, a prime candidate for the 1 November legislative elections, he is the best known among those who oppose the regime. It is a regime which he knows particularly well since he was for a long time one of its most distinguished representatives. A lawyer, son of the old Tunisian bourgeoisie which gave him his sense of discipline, more given to solitude than mingling in a crowd, honest, rather quiet, suspicious, idealistic and ambitious, reserved and modest to the point of concealment, how has Ahmed Mestiri managed to become a key figure to the public of his country and the Maghreb? Whatever the result of the elections, whether Mestiri himself is elected or he succeeds only in having a half dozen of his people elected, as can be expected, his participation distinguishes these first pluralist Tunisian elections, and, perhaps, what will happen afterward.

The bar is a fine support for climbing the ladder to power. A lawyer by profession, Ahmed Mestiri has taken advantage of it. But he is not alone in this. Thus, we must look elsewhere for the unique factors in his political career, perhaps the following: he has several times been a Bourguiba minister, several times ambassador; he has experienced a number of lean periods on the outside (the latest still continuing) and, in fact, has spent almost as many years in power as in opposition.

His political comings and goings, his outbursts, his eloquent, or intended to be eloquent, silences, his cool attitude, his large glasses, his frail and slightly hollowed physique, his conservative clothes, and his unassuming private life are all well-known in Tunisia. But beyond that?

In particular, not everyone knows that this 56-year-old man comes from a well-to-do family, and that though he has been in the public eye for a very long time,

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he himself has been hearing discussion of Tunisian politics for even longer. While he was still in the cradle, his grandfather Hamouda Mestiri was one of the founders of the Destour Party, the first nationalist Tunisian party (which became the Neo-Destour Party, then the PSD, Destourian Socialist Party). Thus, bourgeois grandfather and father, and, like almost all bourgeois, instilled with solid convictions: a penny is a penny, hardship and discipline are the primary strength of armies and young men of good families. Travel by streetcar if you wish, but always arrive on time. And above all--above all--"maintain your rank."

Faced with these imperatives, Ahmed did not disappoint. At least in the beginning. An excellent student at the Rue Tribunal school in Tunis, where he began his studies, and later at Sadiki college, still in Tunis, where he continued them. One of his colleagues was Taieb Mehiri, who would also become a minister. The two young men found they had common interests. They went out on the town together and had long earnest discussions in which they probably reshaped Tunisia, the Maghreb, and the world. A big friendship.

Scandal

Outbreak of World War II. By that time, the old Destour Party had long ago broken up, and Bourguiba had founded in 1934 the Neo-Destour Party. When the German troops, who had entered Tunisia after the American landing in Morocco and Algeria in 1942, left the country after a few months, and the Allies arrived on their heels, Mestiri and Mehiri were no longer wearing short trousers. The Destour Party was a thing of the past. It was the Neo-Destour Party that attracted them. A scandal in the two families, which remained faithful to the old party, and which regarded the new as one which, by dialectical transformation, had become that of the "zoufris" or hooligans. Scandalous, but a big event for the two future politicians. For the first time they were noticed. Bourguiba himself observed: "To have turned Mestiri into a Neo-Destourian--that was something."

After Carnot, law studies in Paris. Despite the distance, Ahmed Mestiri closely followed the activities of the supreme fighter. With other young Tunisians, he prepared a bulletin on the evolution of the Neo-Destour Party. In 1949, Bourguiba was able to leave Cairo, where he had been forced to seek exile because of the measures of the French colonial authorities, and return to his country. Mestiri finished his studies and returned to Tunis, where he joined the bar and began activity for the powerful Tunis federation of the Neo-Destour Party--the second important event which drew attention to him.

It was at this time that he first met Bourguiba, a meeting he would never forget. Bourguiba conquered him by his approach to political action, his arguments, his analytical ability, and the enthusiasm he conveyed.

During this same period, there was another who fascinated Ahmed Mestiri: the great labor leader Farhat Hached, self-taught, and, said Mestiri, "capable of writing articles in first draft without alterations, excellent, and not needing any re-editing." As we know, Hached was assassinated in 1952 by the Red Hand, the terrorist organization of the French protectorate extremists.

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At the time, Mestiri himself was also in the gunsights of the organization, from which he received written threats. He was accused of "giving orders to the 'fellagha'," and he was held "responsible for any assassination against the French or pro-French Tunisians." Sought by the police, he was obliged for the first time to change his appearance by changing his clothes. But more than his raincoat or his soft cap, it was his taciturn nature, his secretive tendency, and his innate suspicion which enabled him to elude traps. And while the repression intensified; the activities of the Tunisian nationalists, and simultaneously of the French military operations, increased; and the prison camps multiplied, Mestiri came and went, transmitted orders, and organized the group of lawyers assigned to defend his arrested compatriots.

Promotion

In 1954 the first Tunisian government was finally formed which was responsible for negotiating with France the agreements on internal autonomy. Tahar Ben Ammar, who headed the government, enlisted the cooperation of Ahmed Mestiri, who thus made his official entry into political life. No longer a scandal. His reputation grew, but his task was not easy, because he had to supervise in effect the expenses of the Tunisian delegation in Paris, which Mestiri felt were too high and didn't hesitate to say so. It was a surprise, therefore, when in the year of independence, 1956, Bourguiba appointed him minister of justice. The supreme fighter made the smiling remark: "I govern with the people who like me least, not with my friends."

Actually, this fine promotion (Mestiri was only 31) could have been simply the result of the head of state's desire to reassure the Tunisian bourgeoisie, who were cautious about him, by assigning to one of their own the task of applying the revolutionary measures which he himself had decided on concerning justice. Indeed, Mestiri drew general attention by a two-fold and considerable reform: elimination of the courts inherited from the French protectorate (easy to do) and elimination of the Tunisian religious courts (much more difficult to achieve). Bourguiba also used his minister of justice to put through his famous Code on the Personal Status of Women, which abolished repudiation, banned polygamy, and instituted divorce. Finally, Bourguiba used Mestiri as intermediary when he delivered Tunisia from a crushing land system by eliminating the "habous"⁽¹⁾ property.

Diplomat

Because he was managing all these reforms, Mestiri caused some grinding of teeth, even in his own family. But today he owes it to his family that his name is associated with changes which mark the inauguration in history of modern Tunisia.

(1) Any Tunisian landowner could convert his property to "habous" property by declaring that at the conclusion of his line it would permanently go to religious causes designated by him. When such a "habous" did not have a specific designation indicated by the deceased, the law provided that it go to the poor and orphans. A "habous" property could, of course, not be sold.

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During the next few years, up to 1966, Mestiri experienced what one may call a kind of desert crossing, despite the very important role he played during the period. Being somewhat doctrinaire, impulsive, and lacking in flexibility, while he was minister of finance after his term in justice, he had difficult relations with Hedi Nouira, governor of the Central Bank (future prime minister), and Bahi Ladgham, the prime minister, in effect, at the time (the title did not yet exist). Alienated from the government, there happened to him what happens in Tunisia (particularly) to a political figure whom you don't want to get rid of completely but whom you feel must be moved away: you make him a diplomat. Ahmed Mestiri served as ambassador successively in Moscow, Cairo, and El-Djazair, which were difficult embassies at the time. In particular, it was not easy to be the first ambassador to Moscow of pro-American Tunisia when Bourguiba decided, 4 years after independence, to establish the first ties with the East. The situation was no less delicate in Cairo and at El-Djazair, where the supporters of Salah Ben Youssef, longtime opponent of the Tunisian head of state, held sway. Even inside Tunisia, Bourguibists like Mohamed Masmoudi criticized Bourguiba's "personal power": how should one proceed in defending Bourguibism under these conditions? Mestiri did well. "Without brilliance, but with dignity," one of his colleagues described it.

Exclusion

The period of the sixties, during which Ahmed Mestiri lived most of the time in the East or the Maghreb, did not really shake his pro-Western views, but did significantly modify his specifically Bourguibist attitudes. Certainly today he attaches more importance to the neutralists, to Africa, and the Arab countries ("our natural allies"). And he readily reaffirms that to him the building of the Maghreb is a historical inevitability. One of his friends commented as follows on these convictions: "Ahmed is not one of those people who systematically search out the new, but every 10 years he arrives at a certainty which he will always hold."

In 1966, return to "business." Mestiri became minister of defense, gave the Tunisian army status, brought young people into its ranks, established the military academy, developed the concept of popular defense in Tunisia, and earned the high esteem of the troops and officers. He is still esteemed today, even by young soldiers who did not know him.

But again, conflict with Bourguiba--this time with Ben Salah in the middle. Ahmed Ben Salah had committed Tunisia to the collectivist experiment. Mestiri did not agree with this, at least in one respect, and he said so at the first opportunity: the new Tunisian economic policy should have been preceded by a genuinely democratic debate. He added that such a debate had not been possible because the country's institutions were functioning poorly. Mestiri was not against strong rule, but he set the condition that it should be freely accepted. Thus, in January 1968 he resigned from the government and was expelled from the party. "They demanded a letter of apologies," he revealed a few months later. "I refused. It was a matter of dignity." Dignity: a key work in Mestiri's language. To him dignity was the motive for all participation. "Politics," he said, "must not go to excess in the name of an ideology or a messianism of whatever variety, or it becomes demagoguery."

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In 1970, 2 years after the furor of January 1968, Mestiri was seated again in a ministerial chair, this time interior. But he had accepted it only on the promise that there would be a program of liberalization of the state and party structures. A year later this liberalization was still marking time, which was obviously not to Mestiri's liking. Then, a new disagreement between Mestiri and Prime Minister Nouira about the appointment of a high official. Bourguiba decides: they will do without Mestiri, definitely too hard to live with. Dismissed from his duties, the former minister and former ambassador goes over to the opposition for good.

Movement

But it was several years before this opposition took the form of a genuine movement and acquired its political label: MDS, Socialist Democratic Movement (1976-1977). Mestiri, more than ever, knew what he wanted. He and 16 party members put this in a declaration, which received considerable publicity. In it, he did not stop with criticism of the single party. He asserted that there should be a general amnesty for all political detainees, that the opposition must be able to speak, that Destourian socialism should be given real content, and that the nation's independence must be protected, a sincere choice be made for Arabization, and the Arabic-Islamic personality of the country be preserved. The movement's successes have been significant. Tunisians are indebted to it for establishing the League of Human Rights in Tunisia, a Council of Public Liberties, and the first opposition paper, AR-RAY, published at the beginning of 1978. In the spring of the same year, one year after its founding, the MDS split in two. Mestiri kept the initials and presented on 13 June of that year the statutes of a party which was not recognized. The other wing of the movement kept the paper AR-RAY, but from 1980 on Mestiri's MDS has had its own paper AL-MUSTAQBAL ("THE FUTURE"). Following the events of Gafsa (end of January 1980) and the change in head of government, Mestiri supported the government initiatives to encourage the "overture" [opening] which Bourguiba announced on 10 April 1981 during the latest PSD congress.

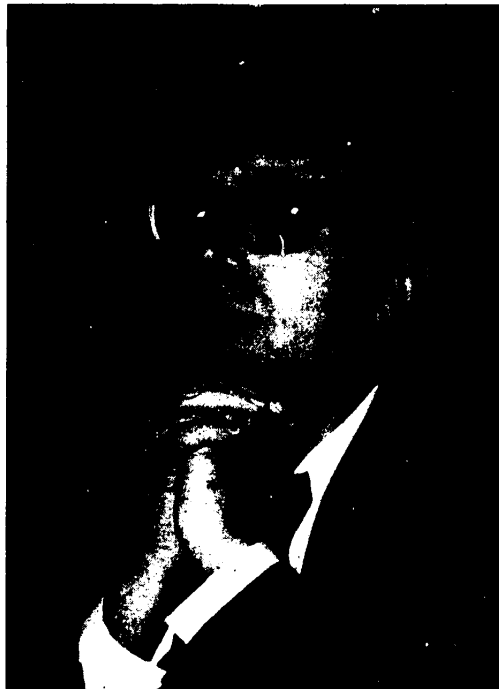
Prudence

In regard to the socialist democrats, the Tunisian Government showed a relative tolerance, thereby putting Mestiri in a delicate position, since he did not want his movement to be used to help make possible the evolution of an authoritarian regime toward a restrained democracy. Liberty is not divisible, he felt. The time spent away from government has not profoundly changed him, but he has sharpened his caution. When will be his next bombshell?

In this Tunisia where half-tones are preferred to the violence of harsh colors, Mestiri's explosive statements cause surprise like a storm in a summer sky, and anyone who does not know the man is likely to picture him as a loud personality, a "big mouth," rather than as he really is with the traits of reserve, modesty, and almost withdrawal. His tastes draw him to solitude and reading, his simplicity and honesty have become legendary. In this country where the bourgeoisie is characterized by greed, he is a simple lodger in a house in the Marsa, or living in the fine residence of his in-laws at Rades.

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One may wonder how this lawyer, whose practice is not the most flourishing, has become a kind of exemplary figure for a large proportion of the Tunisian public. Doubtless because at a time when the entire political class of the country was in submission, he was taking his risks. And because he knew how to persevere. An idealist, Mestiri? Or ambitious? Those who know him believe the qualities are inseparable: he is without doubt both.



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TUNISIA

FIRST PLURALISTIC ELECTIONS EVALUATED

Paris JEUNE AFRIQUE in French No 1088, 11 Nov 81 pp 29-31

[Article by Francois Poli: "The Democratic Machinery"]

[Text] "I gave them pluralism. I opened the door to the year 2000 to them. They cannot say that they had to wait for the death of that fascist, Bourguiba." The chief of state made this statement in private long before the results of the 1 November parliamentary elections were announced (JEUNE AFRIQUE Nos 1086 and 1087).

"The president," those close to him say, "saw neither Mr Mestiri [MDS (Socialist Democratic Movement)], Mr Harmel [PCT (Tunisian Communist Party)] nor Mr Bel Hadj Amor [MUP II (Popular Unity Movement II)] on television. He was satisfied with following the whole campaign on the radio. He is enormously concerned over all this."

Examining the official results of this vote today, Mr Bourguiba has good reason to feel perfectly reassured, if he ever did worry about it: a total victory for the National Front (PSD [Destourian Socialist Party]-UGTT [Tunisian General Federation of Labor] coalition). Not a single opposition candidate was elected. A success that had long since been forecast — but not such a big one. Why?

Of course, the Tunisian leader's personality and past account for part of it. Of course, the PSD has for 25 years had complete freedom to line up the country. Of course, the UGTT candidates on the National Front tickets induced a lot of people to vote, particularly in the former European sections of the capital where the PSD has a very weak foothold. Of course, the great majority of Tunisians are facing many problems — including the elementary one of survival — and we can understand why they more often than not hesitated to run the risk of giving their votes to other men than those already in office and on whom they depend at almost all levels in their local districts or villages. All the more so because these men are the representatives of a government which — and no one disputes the fact — has done a lot for the country.

National Front candidates did not deprive themselves of the opportunity to emphasize the fact throughout the entire election campaign. "We don't have to make promises to you. Just look at what has been accomplished." For the 13 days prior to the vote they toured the country in all directions, accumulated public and private meetings at a truly astounding pace. They talked, talked... talked, even in the very depths of certain working districts where no one had ever expressed himself before they did.

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At the head of the ticket in Monastir (Bourguiba's birthplace), Prime Minister Mohamed Mzali shows up as the recordholder in this marathon. On Friday, 30 October, alone, he held three meetings, granted interviews and inaugurated two textile mills, a tourist complex, a yogurt factory, a toy factory, a school, a plastics factory, a brickyard and a hatchery. He was seen standing on a table, microphone in hand, already haranguing the crowd, while at his feet ministers, advisers and members of his bodyguard, who everywhere had a hard time keeping up with him, could hardly catch their breath.

Is all this, which in fact led us to anticipate a big majority for the National Front's red ballots, enough to explain such a collapse on the part of its opponents? There can be no doubt as to the answer: no.

Aside from the different pressures on voters reported by the opposition and the incidents that studded the election campaign (JEUNE AFRIQUE No 1087), it seems difficult to admit that during the election everything went off in accordance with the wishes expressed by Mr Mzali. In front of all the polling places I entered, and even inside them, I could attest to the presence — and most often muscled at that — of PSD members.

But the accusations leveled by the opposition are both more precise and more serious. "The electoral law and the law itself were violated. Polling place officials were replaced by others after the voting had already begun. Polling booths were missing here and there (in the Gafsa district in particular). Some voters were allowed to vote several times. There were threats."

Some 40 foreign newspapermen followed the course of the elections in Tunis. On Sunday, 1 November, election day, the three opposition parties (MDS, PCT and MUP II) invited them to a joint press conference to read to them a letter from, as Mr Mestiri specified, an official in charge of a polling place who had in essence written the following:

"The delegate [subprefect] from Jebel Jelloud, a suburb of Tunis, got 150 polling-place heads from his district together to advise them that, when the time to count votes arrived, PSD members would create incidents which would permit the official in charge of the polling place, who under the law is responsible for the policing of the polling room, to have the room evacuated. This in order to be able to at their leisure substitute red National Front ballots for opposition ballots."

Other grievances of opposition members: "We were unable to normally seat our delegates who are empowered by the law to check on the voting. On the day of the vote they demanded of them an unexpected authorization, not provided for by the Electoral Code, one issued at the headquarters of the delegation [subprefecture]. That document was only issued, when it was, after a long wait. In the northern and southern suburbs of Tunis the polling places were in operation the whole morning without any opposition representatives."

For all these reasons the MDS, PCT and MUP II as of noon on 1 November decided to withdraw their observers "in order to leave the government with full responsibility for the voting." A hasty decision, it would seem, which at any rate permitted Ministry of Interior Driss Guiga to reply that very day that "the abandonment of the field by the opposition seems very much like a maneuver aimed at charging the few votes it feared it would obtain to pretended irregularities."

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"Not so," opposition members retorted. "The government was driven crazy by the success of our campaign and the number of green ballots (MDS) that were dropped into the voting urns right from the first hours of the balloting. It lost its self-control and imprudently gave way to all possible sorts of lies before everyone's eyes."

For the foreign observer who has closely followed these elections, it today appears to be obvious that, while election campaign incidents have here and there been exaggerated by some opposition members (in what country are election campaigns conducted in an atmosphere of perfect calm and without fistfights?), several of their grievances regarding the regularity of the balloting can nevertheless only be doubted with difficulty. The fact, for example, that MDS leader, Mr Ahmed Mestiri, who headed the ticket in the City of Tunis district, obtained only 1,603 votes (less than any of the others on his ticket) out of a total of 75,950 votes cast seems particularly hard to believe. "Who do they take us for?" "They are making fun of us." Two sentences we hear today in Tunis.

Before the National Front victory, were not these elections about which, after apparent indifference at the outset, people finally succeeded in really getting excited, first of all rather a victory for the regime's tough policy, known for its hostility toward Mr Mzali's attempted democratization experiment? This is the question countless Tunisians are asking themselves, Tunisians who want to retain the hope that the democratic machinery will in spite of everything continue to function.

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YEMEN ARAB REPUBLIC

VARIOUS DOMESTIC, FOREIGN RELATIONS DEVELOPMENTS REVIEWED

'AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI' in San'a'

Paris AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI in Arabic No 243 9-15 Oct 81 pp 45-46

[Article by Ahmad Habib: "Yemen Caught Between the Hammer of Aden and the Anvil of Gulf Cooperation"]

[Text] Parallel to the Gulf Cooperation Council, and facing the Libyan-Ethiopian-Adeni alliance, North Yemen is looking for a foreign policy that is balanced and open to the East and West both. AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI's emissary to San'a' spent several days trying to determine the course of Yemen's delicate, tentative moves between the hammer of Aden and the anvil of Gulf cooperation. He brought back a group of impressions and a conversation with the premier of Yemen.

"From Yemen come surprises"--and this time the surprise took place right at 0900 hours in the morning of 26 September, as the military reviewing grounds in San'a' were thronged with thousands of Yemenis who had come to observe their armed forces parading before the commander general of the forces and president, Col 'Ali 'Abdallah Salih, and unusual movement appeared in the distance--military vehicles advancing toward the main stand, surrounded by dozens of soldiers, from one of which descended Lt Col Abu Bakr Yunus, who headed for the stand to take his place close to the president.

It was a surprise to many people.

This incident could be a key to understanding the events that are now taking place in North Yemen. Col al-Qadhdhafi directed the most vile accusations against the current regime in San'a' during his latest visit to South Yemen in the month of August, and he did not hesitate to say, in al-Dali', a South Yemeni town lying on the North Yemeni border, that he was "responsible for all the acts of sabotage that occur in the Yemen Arab Republic." In a few weeks we then proceeded to send 'Ali 'Abdallah Salih, the president of North Yemen, a letter of apology for the words that had escaped from him and stressed his readiness to attend the 26 September celebrations in San'a'. In both cases the Yemeni officials kept their calm about al-Qadhdhafi's initiatives, the aggressive and apologetic ones, and told the colonel that he would be welcomed at any time. The Libyan president decided not to attend and sent Abu Bakr Yunus, who, in turn, did not wish to remain in San'a' for more than a night, during which he met President Salih and repeated what his president has asserted in his letter, "apologizing for the attack on San'a'," pointing out that the Aden-Tripoli-Addis Ababa treaty was not aimed at San'a'.

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A high-level Yemeni official stressed to AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI that the Yemeni leaders received the Libyan official coolly and recited to him a description of the basic outlines of North Yemeni policy at the present time, which is focused on "noninterference in the affairs of others and a corresponding rejection of interference in our domestic and foreign affairs." The Yemeni leadership expressed the hope to the Libyan official that the Libyans would refrain from interfering on the affairs of Yemen, north or south and would let the Yemenis resolve their problems themselves. The relationship between San'a' and Aden is of such a special nature that no one but the two of them can fathom its complexities.

Every Yemeni official stresses these basic lines of the policy of the current regime in Yemen to every visitor to San'a', whoever he may be. The Yemeni leadership considers that this policy is the sole solution to all the foreign or domestic dangers surrounding Yemen and that North Yemen is the only country in the Arabian Peninsula or the gulf that is not linked by treaties or regional blocs with any other country. To its north and east are the six Gulf Cooperation Council countries--Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and the Sultanate of Oman--and to its south is its twin sister, South Yemen, which became linked by alliance with Libya and Ethiopia recently. Although the Gulf Cooperation Council is the body closest to North Yemeni political orientations, and in spite of all that has been said on the possibility that Yemen might join this council, it has been decided that San'a' is still far from belonging to it, out of its own desire or because of a lack of enthusiasm on the part of the council members.

The Yemen Arab Republic is the only country in the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf that has more or less equal relations with East and West. In San'a' are embassies of the Soviet Union, the United States, the Soviet Union, China and most eastern and western countries. It receives aid from all these countries together; wherever you go in the territory of Yemen, you will see a paved road graced with a sign bearing the name of the country that built it--"a gift from its people to the friendly people of Yemen." China has built a road, as have the Soviet Union, West Germany, and so forth. There are many schools, hospitals and factories European and Arab countries offered "as a gift to the friendly people of Yemen."

We can also sense this tendency in the policy of arming the Yemeni army. For a few years the leaders there have been turning toward diversifying sources of arms, whereas those used to be almost 100 percent Soviet. This is a big development. People who are in the know about Yemeni military affairs say that since the revolution took place in 1962 and indeed before that, Yemen relied on the Soviet Union for its arms, and now it has started to import arms from the United States and France. In the latest military display, MiG and Sukhoi aircraft plied the skies of San'a' alongside American F-5 planes, while American tanks rolled behind Soviet tanks and French-manufactured armored vehicles. Naturally such arms require foreign trainers and experts, and they are actually there.

We see the same tendencies in the Arab context. The Yemeni leaders have managed so far to establish balanced relations with all Arab countries--except Egypt, of course. Relations with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are now in their quietest state (we would not say their best state), and the same is true vis-a-vis the Gulf states. With regard to the "perseverance and steadfastness" countries relations with them are normal. There remains the last neighbor, the fraternal one, in words, deeds and history, South Yemen. Here we see that discussions on union are going on "with the objective of realizing the dream of all Yemenis of attaining union between the two segments of the single nation."

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What Domestically?

Domestically, it appears that the current Yemeni leadership has made important strides in breaking down the symbols and signs of the local Yemeni social and political situation. For hundreds of years Yemen was governed by the system of tribes and clans, or the imamate, causing it to live in a medieval backwardness through the first half of the 20th century. This had the effect of causing violent social and political jolts when a change as great as the one of 26 September 1962 occurred. There then occurred the civil war, with foreign support, exploiting the tribal and clan structure in order to inflame domestic disputes. Now the current regime is trying to overcome these disputes by encouraging a climate of political liberalization among the various influential political and social forces ranging from the leaders of the tribes with their great influence to the new growing social forces, that is, the politicized intellectuals. In the wake of the revolution, with the expansion of education and fellowships, groups of educated young people whose political orientations range from far right to far left have come into being. These new political forces managed to reach agreement on a minimal alliance and in 1976 formed what is called "the Democratic National Front."

Compromises Solutions

In another area, the current Yemeni leadership has had to face the issues of development and progress and provide work for millions of citizens. Yemen, with a population of 10 million according to the latest census, is one of the poorest Arab countries in terms of natural resources, which has driven many people to emigration, of which Yemen's neighbor Saudi Arabia has the main share, with 1 million Yemeni emigrants working and living in the kingdom. However, emigration has never been the best solution for any people in the world. In San'a' they will tell you "Where have we come now since the days of the imam?" They are proud that they have electricity, sanitary water, paved streets, schools, hospitals, and modern means of communication, true, but it is also true that development brings special problems and issues with it. The people of Yemen, who were satisfied with the simplest ingredients of life in the time of the imam, today have aspirations of varying quality and quantity, now that 19 years have elapsed since the elimination of that extremely backward regime. Thus the need arises of coping in a practical, effective way with unlimited aspirations and limited resources. Perhaps these internal realities can lead us to understand the keys or dimensions of the current leadership's political orientations, which are aimed at avoiding domestic and foreign threats, prompting them to choose compromise solutions in the domestic and foreign contexts. Domestically, they are striving for "reconciliation" among the various political and social forces, and the government is now active in discussing a "charter" which the political forces are agreeing on as a practical political guide to the future. Once agreement is given to the charter, elections will be held to choose the first parliament in the history of Yemen. This will take the place of the advisory, or consultative, council that exists now. That is supposed to happen in the next few months.

A number of questions remain:

Will these "tension-easing" measures in the domestic context help solve the domestic "Yemeni problem" and bring about a climate of political and social stability that Yemen has not witnessed for a long time, both before and after the revolution?

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Or will the current political leadership, represented by the president, 'Ali 'Abdallah Salih, and his prime minister, 'Abd-al-Karim al-Iryani, succeed in an area where former leaders have not succeeded for 19 years since the revolution, starting with Marshall 'Abdallah al-Sallal, Yemen's first president following the successful revolution, passing through al-Qadi al-Iryani and al-Hamdi, and ending with President al-Ghashmi, who was killed, like his predecessor al-Hamdi, in obscure circumstances?

Then, to what extent will the current Yemeni leadership be able to stick to non-alignment between east and west? Will the Soviet Union or the Americans let it receive aid of every form and stripe without ultimately making it pay the price, especially since Yemen enjoys an important strategic position at the entryway to the Red Sea, is the neighbor of the oilwells in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, and is truly considered to be the rear entrance to the Gulf? We might add: Is it reasonable to assume that the concentrated Soviet presence in Yemen, represented by a concentrated military and economic aid authority and experts in various fields spread out among the villages and towns of Yemen from north to south, is just a coincidence, a gift whose only aim is the satisfaction of the friendly people of Yemen?

What is said about the Soviet Union can be said about the American presence, the Chinese presence and German activity, eastern and western alike, not to mention insistent penetration by all the countries of Western and Eastern Europe.

The question, or issue, imposes itself once again: Will the current leaders of this Yemen, in this condition, be able to persist in their neutrality and benefit from everyone's expertise without being presented a bill of accounts in the end?

These and other questions were put before the current prime minister of Yemen, Dr 'Abd-al-Karim al-Iryani; he responded frankly and placed the dots on many letters.

Al-Sallal's Return

Paris AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI in Arabic No 243 9-15 Oct 81 p 46

[Text] After the 14 years he spent outside his country, mostly in Egypt, Marshal 'Abdallah al-Sallal, the first president of the Yemen Arab Republic following the successful 26 September Revolution which did away with the imamate regime in North Yemen, has come back to San'a'. Al-Sallal's return has come about in response to an appeal made recently by the current president of Yemen, Col 'Ali 'Abdallah Salih, to the two former presidents of Yemen, al-Sallal and al-Qadi 'Abd-al-Rahman al-Iryani, who has been living in Syria since his dismissal from the government in a move the army made, under the command of Lt Col Ibrahim Hamdi (the late president) on 13 June, known as the June Corrective Movement. Yemeni sources have confirmed to AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI that al-Qadi al-Iryani has responded to the Yemeni president's appeal and that his return to San'a' is expected in the next few days.

This political step has raised many predictions among people who understand the inside story of Yemeni political affairs. The two former Yemeni presidents are considered historic in Yemen. 'Abdallah al-Sallal was the first president, from 26 September, that is, the successful revolution, to 5 November 1967, the day the political current rose up against him under the command of al-Qadi 'Abd-al-Rahman al-Iryani and managed to remove him from power, and he left San'a' for Cairo,

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continuing to reside there until his recent return to Yemen. Al-Qadi, in his turn, remained in power from that date until 13 June 1974; he is a personality who has played an important role in the domestic political context of Yemen, its northern and southern segments both.

The questions that are now being raised on the Yemeni state are: Why did President Salih choose this time specifically to offer the former two presidents an invitation to return? Does this step mean a political relaxation in the context of the numerous political powers and currents that the Yemeni stage is teeming with, especially since the Yemeni regime is preparing at this stage to choose the first parliament in the modern history of Yemen?

On this subject Dr 'Abd-al-Karim al-Iryani, the current prime minister, responded, "The 26 September revolution truly appreciates everyone who played a part in it and recognizes his good works in serving the people. Therefore President 'Ali 'Abdallah Salih's appeal has been a concrete step in this context. Our brothers al-Sallal and al-Iryani are two Yemeni citizens who have the right to return to their country at any time, and what applies to them applies to any Yemeni citizen living abroad who wishes to return to his homeland. Yemen is open to its children."

In response to a question from AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI on the political significance of this step, he said, "There is no specific political significance. If you mean the 'political activity' of either of the two former presidents, we will welcome any political effort they may have been making in the service of the people, but I believe that both have grown old and would prefer to live the rest of their lives in peace on the nation's territory."

Interview With Prime Minister

Paris AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI in Arabic No 243, 9-15 Oct 81, p 47

[Text] Dr 'Abd-al-Karim al-Iryani, prime minister of the Yemen Arab Republic, is a Yemeni personality well known for his Arab nationalist inclinations. Alongside that, he is one of the most famous economists in Yemen. This interview with him covered many questions related to Yemen's domestic and foreign situation in the context of the international variables the Arabian Peninsula area is going through at the current time.

I asked Dr al-Iryani,

"Many political observers differ over domestic and foreign Yemeni political orientations at the current time. Foremost among them is the process of opening the door wide to various forms of foreign aid, from East and West. Don't you consider that this 'opening up' will have the effect of influencing Yemen's freedom of national decisionmaking in the near future?"

[Answer] I do not think so at all. We are an independent sovereign country ruled by a national regime arising from the heart of Yemeni soil and flowing into it. Our opening up to various countries does not mean that we are neglecting our country's independence. We have not given any country that offers us aid any concessions whatever on our territory, military bases in our midst, or facilities. Likewise we do not belong to any alliance or regional or international treaty. In spite of that, let me assure you that our country is linked to everyone by firm friendly relations based on a reciprocity of interests and benefits, especially since the current Yemeni political leadership's thinking springs from Arab

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nationalist and Islamic notions. Above and beyond that, our policies and our relations with Arab countries are based on acceptance of the principle of a multiplicity of ideas within the Arab world, even though we do not share some of our brothers' ideas. Thus you can see that we have good relations with all Arab countries. Here I can give you an example: a short time ago a conference of Arab ministers of justice was held in San'a' and not a single Arab minister failed to attend and take part in it. Don't you agree with me that that is something that occurs rarely now in various Arab conferences held on various levels?

[Question] But don't you consider that this concentrated foreign presence on the territory of Yemen, in the form of various projects, is something that raises questions?

[Answer] It is something, rather, that calls for appreciation and wonderment, and thanks and gratitude to these countries which have come to Yemen, offering the hand of aid and helping to save the country from its uncertain progress and backwardness. Yemen is a country poor in resources that needs to give help to everyone in order to make up for the long centuries of backwardness it has gone through. In order to develop and to make up for what we missed in the context of the imamate rule, we have found that the best solution available is for us to open up politically to everyone, while totally retaining the freedom to make political decisions in our country. Therefore this approach arises from a basic principle of Yemeni policy, which is positive neutrality toward this opening up that we see everywhere on the territory of Yemen.

[Question] What do you mean by that?

[Answer] To explain what I mean, let me give you examples in the form of projects that have been carried out in Yemen via foreign aid:

The San'a' airport: the Soviets started to build it, and it was completed at the hands of the West Germans. The Ta'izz-San'a' road was built by the Soviets, the al-Mafraq-Ta'izz road was started by the Americans and completed by the Kuwaiti Development Fund, the al-Jadidah [sic]-Jizan road was financed in full by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and there are other projects. That will show you the size and type of massive project in which many countries of the world have taken part.

Dr al-Iryani went on, laughing,

"I am not exaggerating when I say that Yemen represents a United Nations of development, and I believe that Yemeni experience in this field is unique of its kind for all developing countries."

Able To Defend

[Question] But don't you believe that the day will come when every country will demand a price or something in exchange for the aid it has offered to Yemen?

[Answer] I do not believe that that will happen. The countries that have helped us know that we are a poor country and need aid. Aid is recognized in all corners of the world. In any event, let me stress once again that Yemen is able at all times to defend its interests and its national soil against any foreign interference in its affairs.

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[Question] You are the only country in the Arabian Peninsula that has not joined the Gulf Cooperation Council or the Aden-Ethiopia-Libya alliance. What are the reasons for this "Yemeni phenomenon?" Can the fact that you have not joined such alliances be explained by specific goals?

[Answer] At the outset, we here in Yemen stress the Arab countries' right to work within the context of the Arab League Charter. The Gulf Cooperation Council is an experiment which is taking place among a number of Arab countries within this framework. Therefore we have no opposition to it. The Arab League Charter stipulates that any Arab country, whatever it may be, has the right to be incorporated into another Arab country for the sake of achieving a federation or unity between themselves. Because we adhere to this charter, we bless the establishment of any union of any kind between two Arab countries. President 'Ali 'Abdallah Salih was the first Arab president to send a telegram of greetings to the Syrian and Libyan presidents when unity between the two countries was declared.

[Question] But aren't you afraid of being in a kind of 'isolation' in facing certain alliances?

[Answer] We do not believe that any regional alliance whatever in the area will influence our platform of independence and neutrality.

[Question] It has been said that you have striven on more than one occasion to join the Gulf Cooperation Council. However, these efforts did not meet with success.

[Answer] Everything that has been said in this regard is mere rumor that has been spread around by the papers and has no basis of truth.

[Question] Why don't you join the Gulf Cooperation Council?

[Answer] Why should we join? Our relations with all the countries in the council are good. The establishment of this council has not affected these relations in any form whatever. They are very high level relations and we are totally satisfied with them. What concerns us is the essence, not the form. I mean the form of the relationship, whether it takes the guise of a federation, a council, or something else.

Concerning Yemeni-Libyan Relations

[Question] Did Lt Col Abu Bakr Yunus' visit to San'a' and [his] attendance at the 26 September celebrations, help restore relations between Yemen and Libya to a natural state?

[Answer] We did not start [matters] by attacking Libya or its president and policies; Col al-Qadhdhafi did, when he made his speech in al-Dali' attacking us, creating a certain degree of confusion and ambivalence in our midst. However, I can assert that with the contacts made between the two fraternal countries the disputes have been eliminated and with the appearance of Abu Bakr Yunus we consider the matter ended. We are not picking quarrels with any Arab or foreign country whatever.

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[Question] Have you discussed the issue of financial aid to Yemen with the Libyan emissary, or was some aid offered?

After laughing uproariously, the prime minister replied,

"Sir, if he was offering aid, he would not basically have come to San'a'!"

[Question] Many questions are revolving about the anticipated union between the two segments of the single nation of Yemen. Perhaps the most conspicuous of these is, how can a union be established between two countries each of which has a political, social and economic system that radically differs from the other?

[Answer] That is an important question indeed. While I understand the motives behind this question, I must stress, or concentrate on, a very important point in this regard, which is that what joins the northern segment of Yemen to its southern segment is much greater than anything that separates the two. We are a single people and a single territory historically, geographically, and in terms of civilization. Before these facts all other obstacles, whatever they might be, dissolve and disappear. The motive force within our people toward the attainment of unity is more powerful than anything else in every Yemeni, from the north of the country and the south. In spite of that, no political leadership that exists in the north or the south of Yemen can ignore these deep Yemeni feelings and the deep-rooted desire within the spirit of every Yemeni citizen.

Where have the plans for union gone?

[Question] So why the delay in attaining this great objective?

[Answer] There is no delay. Agreement to union has been made in a broad manner by the Yemeni leaders in the north and the south. All that remains is the fact that we desire to establish a union on strong, firm foundations. Thus joint union committees, political, constitutional, economic and educational committees and so on, have been formed by the two segments. These committees are on the verge of completing their final touches on a constitution for the union state. It will hold its last meeting next December.

He went on, "Meetings between the two segments of Yemen on various levels are almost constant. There is an agreement which stipulates in principle that the two Yemeni presidents should meet to review the issues of Yemeni unity. The last meeting was in June 1980 and the meeting that took place recently between the two presidents in San'a' was extremely important, since they agreed that the unity committees should complete their activities. A new committee has been formed to review what the various committees have achieved, and it will prepare a report on its activity which will be presented to the two presidents in November, that is, on the occasion of the southern segment's independence day celebration.

[Question] What broad outlines of the constitution have been agreed on so far?

[Answer] The constitution of the state of union embraces the notion of Arabhood and Islam, that is, national Arab policy and Islamic belief.

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[Question] Do you believe that the Yemeni leaders in the south will give agreement to this constitution?

[Answer] First, the constitutional committee that approved these outlines in the constitution includes the two ministers of justice from the two segments, in addition to legal experts and consultants from the north and the south. Second, the constitution will be presented to the whole Yemeni people and they will have the last word. The political leaders in the two segments will have to comply with the judgment of the people.

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YEMEN ARAB REPUBLIC

BRIEFS

YAR REBELS CEASEFIRE--Aden, 24 Nov (REUTER)--The South Yemen-backed National Democratic Front (NDF), which has been waging a guerrilla war in North Yemen, has agreed to a ceasefire starting on Thursday, NDF sources said here today. The agreement was reached yesterday in Kuwait in talks between North Yemeni President 'Ali 'Abdallah Salih and the leader of the Aden-based NDF, Sultan Ahmad 'Umar, they said. President Salih also met his South Yemeni counterpart, 'Ali Nasir Muhammad, under the auspices of the emir of Kuwait, Sheykh Jabir al-Ahmad al-Sabah, during a one-day visit on their way to tomorrow's Arab summit in Morocco. Relations between moderate North Yemen and its Marxist neighbour have been strained by political and ideological differences. The sources said the ceasefire, effective at noon (0900 GMT) on Thursday, was the third this year. The leftist guerrillas, seeking to overthrow the North Yemen Government, have been fighting the army in four central and southern provinces. The two sides accused each other of violating a reconciliation agreement reached in January last year, which included a ceasefire and formation of a coalition government to be followed by general elections. There was no comment from the North Yemen Government on the reported ceasefire. [Text] [JN241839 London REUTER in English 1822 GMT 24 Nov 81]

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